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ABSTRACT

All language teachers, even those committed to teaching language in context, must occasionally provide examples of grammatical or syntactic structures. When searching for effective examples, teachers can evaluate them by asking the following questions: (1) Considering the context and content, is the use of the target structure appropriate?; (2) Does the example illustrate the need for the target structure (or is there another structure that would do as well)?; (3) Does the example encourage formation of a false hypothesis about the target structure?; (4) What does the student need to know about the world in order to understand the example?; (5) Will the student know how examples in a set relate to each other?; (6) Is the example sentence fiction (requiring imagination to interpret) or about the real world?; (7) Is there anything in the example that might keep the student focusing on what is important?; (8) Does it exemplify what it is intended to exemplify?; and (9) How much does the example alone tell the student? (MSE)

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Choosing Helpful Examples of Structures

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Every language teacher is called on at times to provide examples of structures. Even teachers who strongly believe in teaching language in context must occasionally present examples of language on display out of context. Ideally, these examples will be effective; they will help students understand. This paper proposes nine questions that teachers can ask when searching for effective examples of structures. Examples from ESL textbooks are examined in light of the questions and found in some cases to be inadequate. The questions give rise to ten principles of exemplification against which examples can be tested.

Imagine that you are teaching an advanced ESL class and are called on to provide an example of the passive voice with *will*. You write on the board:

- (1) The new highway ~~will~~ be completed in two years.

A student asks, "Can I omit *-ed*?" You answer, "No; you have to have *-ed* when you form the passive voice with a regular verb: *The new highway will be*" Stopping, you see that you're headed for an apparent counterexample to the rule you've just stated: *will be complete* doesn't sound so bad after all. Your choice of example has gotten you into trouble.

Imagine another class in which you are asked to provide an example of some different ways of connecting clauses in a way that shows contrast. You begin to write a set of sentences on the

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board:

- (2) One of her eyes is blue, but her other eye is green.
- (3) One of her eyes is blue, yet her other eye is green.
- (4) One of her eyes is blue; however, her other eye is green.
- (5) One of her eyes is blue; on the other hand, her other eye is green.

Stepping back, you scrutinize the set. The first sentence seems okay, the second not bad. But the sentence with *however* somehow doesn't ring true, and the last one is downright freakish. Again, it's a problem in the choice of examples.

All teachers, even those who are committed to teaching language in context, are called on from time to time to produce examples of language on display out of context. When we are asked to come up with an example of a structure, we hope to produce language that sounds natural, exemplifies what it is intended to exemplify, and enlightens students without inviting distracting questions. And this we have to do, often, with little time for thought. Textbook writers face the same challenge, and although they have advantages of time and editorial help, they nevertheless produce bad example sentences from time to time. (Examples 2 - 5 above are, in fact, from a published text.)

My goal in this paper is to encourage teachers and materials writers to give some thought to what makes an example good or bad or in between. I will propose nine questions that we can ask ourselves when we examine sentences that are used as examples of structures. I will present examples, some from texts and some of my own, and will measure them against the questions.¹

¹ The order of the questions is not significant. All examples not attributed are my own. The texts are these:

Text A - Azar (1981)

Text D - Danielson & Hayden (1973)

Text F - Frank (1972)

Text K - Krohn (1971)

Texts M1 and M2 - Maclin (1981
and [second edition] 1987)

Text P - Pollock (1982)

Text S - Stevenson (1987)

Examples (2) - (5) are from Text M2.

The purpose of this paper is not to criticize texts. No exhaustive examination of texts was undertaken, so no conclusions about the effectiveness of the examples in any of the texts is justified.

Some of my questions are closely related with others, and some overlap is inevitable. Some of the examples I discuss with respect to one question could as well be discussed under another question. I will make some of my points more than once, in different places and in different ways. This is deliberate: my hope is that a reader who is not convinced at one point may be convinced by a later statement of the same argument in another way.

The final section of the paper lists some principles of exemplification, all but one of which are derived directly from the questions. That section will serve as a summary.

NINE QUESTIONS ABOUT EXAMPLES OF STRUCTURE

Question 1: Considering the context and content of the example, is the use of the target structure in the example appropriate? (*Context* here means *situational context*. It may be a situational context that is given, or it may be one that the student is expected to imagine.)

Consider the use of a fronted-preposition relative clause in an example such as (6):

- (6) The music to which we listened last night was good.
(Text A, page 211)

No context is given for the example, so we have to imagine a context. The topic of the sentence suggests conversation, as does the use of the deictic elements *we* and *last night*. The problem, of course, is that the target structure--the relative clause with a fronted preposition--is generally used in more formal contexts; it does not sound natural for most speakers in a sentence of ordinary conversation. The use of the target structure in (6) is therefore not appropriate to the content of (6) or to the context that we most readily imagine for the sentence. Alternatively, we might say that we can imagine *no* context for (6)--because it includes elements that suggest an informal context as well as one element, the target structure, that points to a formal context.

A second example of the same target structure illustrates the

same problem:

- (7) She is the woman about whom I told you.
(Text A, page 211)

If we are to imagine a context for (7), it is again conversation; yet we can only conclude that the person who speaks such a sentence does not use English as most native speakers do. (It looks as though the author has tried to suggest a formal context with the uncontracted *she is*. Given the content of the sentence, however, the lack of contraction is not enough to convince the reader to accept the sentence as belonging to formal discourse.)

Now compare (6) and (7) with another example of the same structure:

- (8) These are the earlier poets from whom Shakespeare
drew many of his ideas.
(Text M2, page 289)

The academic content of (8) suggests a more formal context for the sentence. We imagine (8) to be a sentence in a lecture or a piece of academic writing. Since the use of the target structure is natural to such contexts, (8)--unlike (6) and (7)--sounds natural.

A similar mismatch between the target structure and context and content occurs in (9), which is intended to exemplify the use of *therefore*:

- (9) It was raining; therefore, I carried an umbrella.
(Text M2, page 87)

Given the trivial content of (9), the use of *therefore* is unnatural. A more appropriate example would have less trivial content:

- (10) In the 19th century West, mail delivery was unreliable,
and in remote places, mail often came only a few times
during the year; therefore the arrival of a letter was an
important occasion.

It may be argued that the shorter and simpler example of (9) does a better job than (10) in making it easy for the student to see at a glance the relationship between two clauses that *therefore* expresses. I agree. I only want to point out that (9) is deficient in one respect, and that for that reason it may not be the best model for the target structure. I suggest that a teacher or text writer who uses an example like (9) should at least include alongside it an example like (10), which is more true to the way *therefore* is really used.

Question 2: Does the example illustrate the *need* for the target structure? (Does the target structure contribute information to the sentence? Is there another structure that would do the job as well?)

If the target structure contributes information to the sentence, and if no other structure would be a good substitute for the target structure, we can say that the example illustrates the *need* for the target structure. The example in (11) fails to illustrate the need for the target structure, the infinitive phrase with *too*:

- (11) That box is too heavy for Bob to lift.
(Text A, page 199)

To see that this is so, we need only to compare (11) with (12):

- (12) That box is too heavy for Bob.

In most contexts, (12) would be interpreted exactly as (11) is. There is no need for the infinitive in (11); the target structure contributes no information that is not equally well understood when it is absent. If we modify (11) slightly, we can make the target structure more informative:

- (13) That box is too wide for Bob to lift.
(14) That box is too heavy for Bob to lift with one hand.

The examples in (15) also fail to illustrate the need for the target structure:

- (15) A student came into the room. I looked at the student.
Some students came into the room. I looked at the students.
I drank some water. The water was very cold.
(Text A, page 386)

The examples are intended to illustrate two things: the use of *the* with any kind of noun--singular, plural, or uncountable--and the use of *the* and a repeated noun to show identity with a preceding noun phrase. The target structure does contribute information--it shows the identity of the two noun phrases in each sentence--but the target structure is not necessary, and in fact would probably be avoided in sentences like those in (15) in favor of another means the grammar provides to contribute the same information:

- (16) A student came into the room. I looked at her.
Some students came into the room. I looked at them.
I drank some water. It was very cold.

An example from another text shows that it is not difficult to exemplify the same target structure in such a way that the example illustrates the need for the target structure:

- (17) Here's a pen, some paper, and some envelopes.
Please return the pen, but you can keep the paper
and the envelopes.
(Text D, page 117)

Another way of getting at the point of question (7), for some examples at least, is to put it this way: does the example illustrate an obligatory application of a rule? Suppose that we want to illustrate the "double possessive" structure:

- (18) A friend *of mine* is coming to visit next week.
(19) A friend *of the teacher's* is coming to visit next week.

In (18), the structure is obligatory in the sense that the pronoun must be possessive: **a friend of me* is not correct. In (19), however, the possessive is not obligatory: we can equally well say *a friend of the teacher*. For this reason, (18) is the better example; it better illustrates the need for the structure.

Question 3: Does the example encourage the student to form a false hypothesis about the target structure?

Suppose we choose to illustrate the passive voice in the simple past tense with this example:

(20) My dog was hit by a car.

The example is consistent with at least three possible hypotheses about how the simple past passive is formed: (a) using a past form of *be* and the base form of the main verb, (b) using a past form of *be* and the simple past form of the main verb, and (c) using a past form of *be* and the past participle of the main verb (the right hypothesis). The example itself does not disprove any of the hypotheses. The reason, of course, is an accidental property of the main verb *hit*: its principal parts are identical. We might instead try an example such as this:

(21) My dog was examined by a veterinarian.

But even (21) is consistent with one of the false hypotheses, (b). We can eliminate both of the false hypotheses by using a verb that has a past participle distinct from its base form and its past tense form:

(22) My dog was eaten by a tiger.

Example (22) is not consistent with either of the false hypotheses, (a) or (b). There may be other false hypotheses that it is consistent with, but we have eliminated at least two.

An example of "causative *have*" illustrates the same problem:

(23) He had the barber cut his hair very short.

The student who is given (23) as an example of causative *have*

with an active complement is free to assume that *cut* is a base form, a past form, or a past participle. An example with another verb shows that the verb in the complement is a base form:

(24) He had the barber trim his beard.

In both (20) and (23), the problem was the choice of verb. In (25), the problem is the choice of pronoun:

(25) I appreciated her taking the time to help.

As an example of a possessive + gerund form of complement, *her taking the time to help* may be misleading in that *her* is not uniquely possessive: *her* is also an object form. A better example would substitute *their*, *his*, or *your*. The improved example would not allow the student to analyze the pronoun in the complement as an object form rather than a possessive.

Of course, it is never possible to eliminate all possible false hypotheses that students may initially form about structures; but with some care, we can hope to eliminate at least some of the obvious ones.

Question 4: What does the student need to know about the world in order to understand the example?

If we want to exemplify the use of epistemic *must* (*must* for statements of inference), we might choose an example such as (26).

(26) John's last name is O'Hara. He must be of Irish descent.

In order to appreciate the use of *must* in (27), the student must know that *O'Hara* is an Irish name. If the student doesn't know this, the information in the first sentence does not--for the student--constitute evidence for the conclusion that the second sentence expresses. In order to use (27) as an example of epistemic *must* without assuming too much about the student's knowledge of the world, we need to add a little information:

- (27) John's last name is O'Hara. That's an Irish name,
so he must be of Irish descent.

Consider next an example that illustrates the use of *although* to introduce a concessive clause:

- (28) Although I prefer warm climates, I took my
vacation in Newfoundland.

A student who knows that Newfoundland does not have a warm climate is on the way to understanding this use of *although* -- both its syntax and its meaning. For the student who doesn't know this, the example illustrates nothing but the syntax.

Question 5: Will the student know how examples in a set relate to each other? (Are they paraphrases? Do they give different information? Contradictory information?)

Consider the following rule and examples for "causative *have*."

- (29) [rule] Use *have* with an object followed by a bare infinitive.
(30) [example] Emma had everyone come to her party.
(31) [example] Paul has Stephanie buy the tickets.
(32) [rule] Use *have* with an object followed by an *-ing* form.
(33) [example] Emma had everyone coming to her party.
(34) [example] Paul has Stephanie buying the tickets.
(Text M1, page 71)

The student who reads these rules and examples will probably assume (no doubt correctly) that the sentences about Emma are not intended to have any relationship to the sentences about Paul. There is nothing to suggest a relationship: no content words are repeated, and the topics of the sentences are different. But what is the student to assume about the two sentences about Emma (or the two about Paul)--which differ only in the presence of *-ing*? Does the *-ing* change the meaning? The text does not say. Apparently the student is expected to understand, without being told, that in spite of the syntactic difference, the sentences are not paraphrases. And, of course, they are not. But

elsewhere in the same text, the student finds this example of an active-passive pair:

- (35) A flood destroyed Mr. Johnson's house.
 - (36) Mr. Johnson's house was destroyed by a flood.
- (Text M1, page 238)

Here again, the student is not told whether the sentences are paraphrases. But in this case the student's judgment must be just the opposite of the judgment made (one hopes) about the sentences with Emma and Paul. For (35) and (36), the student is expected to understand that, in spite of a significant syntactic difference, the sentences *are* paraphrases.

An unstated principle, which I will call the principle of minimal difference, seems to exert a great influence on teachers and textbook authors in their exemplification of structures. The principle of minimal difference says that in order to focus on a structural contrast, we should present contrasting target structures in sentences that differ minimally. It is the principle that leads to examples like these (as well as others we have already seen):

- (37) John likes milk, and so does Mary.
 - (38) John likes milk, and Mary does too.
 - (39) John doesn't like milk, and neither does Mary.
 - (40) John doesn't like milk, and Mary doesn't either.
- (Text A, page 267)

(The target structures, of course, are the forms in the second conjuncts.)

We may feel that examples like (37) - (40) require less of the student than examples that don't differ minimally: once the student has read the first line of the series he does not need to process any more new words or structures other than the target structures. But there is another task that examples like these require of the student. To appreciate this task, we need to ask ourselves what steps we go through in interpreting examples like (37) - (40). When we read (37), we imagine a situational context

that the sentence might fit into (as we do for any sentence out of context). Then we read (38), and the repetition of words encourages us to keep in mind the same imagined context: these are the same people in the same situation. The second sentence is odd, however, in that it gives no new information--contrary to our normal expectation that successive sentences about the same situation will give different information. We either accept this abnormality or we imagine a new context for (38). We read (39). Again, the repetition encourages us to keep in mind the same context. If we do this, however, we find that (39) contradicts (37) and (38). We either accept this contradiction or imagine a different context--and so it goes.

I believe that most students can cope easily with examples like (37) - (40) once they have become text-wise and have learned to accept contradictions and sentences that give no information. But I suggest that we can easily avoid relying on the student's imagination--and still follow the principle of minimal difference in spirit. We can allow the student to keep the *same* context in mind, and at the same time focus clearly on the structural difference we are trying to get across, with examples like (41) - (44):

- (41) John likes milk, and so does Mary.
- (42) John likes beer, and Mary does too.
- (43) John doesn't like coffee, and neither does Mary.
- (44) John doesn't like tea, and Mary doesn't either.

The contrast of the target structures still stands out, and the student is now free to imagine the same context for all of the sentences. This is not to say that the sentences now group together as a natural-sounding discourse; but each sentence does give new information, and there are no contradictions.

With semantically complex target structures, examples that follow the principle of minimal difference may confound even a text-wise student. Consider the following examples of three types of conditional sentences:

- (45) If he knows the answer, he will tell her.

- (46) If he knew the answer, he would tell her.
 - (47) If he had known the answer, he would have told her.
- (Text K, page 257)

The syntactic differences among (45) - (47) are salient enough--the examples follow the principle of minimal difference--but the students' mental task is considerable. If the students understand (45), they imagine for it a context in which the speaker does not know whether "he" knows the answer. When they read (46), they must imagine a context in which the speaker knows that "he" does not know the answer. The students must either accept this contradiction or imagine that (46) fits a different context. The writer of these examples is careful to make it clear to the student that the sentences apply to different situations, but the problem remains that the situations are inconsistent with each other. Again, some small changes allow us to imagine the same situation for all of the sentences, while following the principle of minimal difference in spirit:

- (48) If he knows the answer to number 5, he will tell her.
- (49) If he knew the answers to all of the questions, he would tell her.
- (50) If he had known the answers to the questions on last week's quiz, he would have told her.

I believe that (48) - (50) are at least a small improvement over (45) - (47). They do not require the student to form contradictory sets of presuppositions for each sentence. Each sentence does, obviously, require a *different* presupposition, but these presuppositions are consistent with each other.

In a section about tenses in Text S, we find these examples:

- (51) I have lived here for ten years.
 - (52) I have been living here for ten years.
 - (53) I had lived there for ten years before we moved.
 - (54) I had been living there for ten years before we moved.
 - (55) I will have lived here for ten years by fall.
 - (56) I will have been living here for ten years by fall.
- (Text S, p. 124)

In this set, the author has made a helpful switch from the first

pair of sentences to the second: *there* replaces *here*, allowing the second pair of sentences to be consistent with the first. The third pair, however, fails in this regard; it is not consistent with the first pair. Here too, a change as small as the change of *here* to *there* would solve the problem: if *ten* becomes *eleven*, the entire set of examples is consistent with the same situation.

It is the principle of minimal difference, of course, that accounts for many of the most unnatural-sounding examples in texts, including some that we have already looked at. The example quoted above about *the music to which we listened* is from a set of examples that follows the principle of minimal difference:

- (57) She is the woman about whom I told you.
 - (58) She is the woman whom I told you about.
 - (59) She is the woman that I told you about.
 - (60) She is the woman I told you about.
- (Text A, page 211)

It should be clear, however, that the more natural example we quoted can also be presented in such a set:

- (61) These are the earlier poets from whom Shakespeare drew many of his ideas.
 - (62) These are the earlier poets whom Shakespeare drew his ideas from.
 - (63) These are the earlier poets that Shakespeare drew his ideas from.
 - (64) These are the earlier poets Shakespeare drew his ideas from.
- (Text M2, page 289)

The more academic content which makes (61) an improvement over (57) is acceptable in *both* the formal and informal varieties of relative clause, unlike the conversational content of (57).

Question 6: Is the example sentence fiction?

I make a distinction between fiction and nonfiction sentences. A glance at some pairs of sentences will show what I mean:

Fiction	Nonfiction
(65a) Mary's hat is similar to Jane's hat. (Text F, page 124)	(65b) Norway is similar to Sweden in its climate. (Text M1, page 92)
(66a) If you had told me about the problem, I would have helped you. (Text A, page 344)	(66b) If Reagan had lost the 1984 election, he would have gone back to California.
(67a) They have waited since 10:00. (Text M1, page 336)	(67b) Alaska has belonged to the U.S. since 1867.

The fiction sentences are one-sentence stories that are not tied to anything in the real world. The nonfiction sentences are about the real world; they do not require any imagination to interpret. If I present (66a) as an example of a certain type of hypothetical conditional sentence, I have to make it clear to my students that "you" did not tell "me" and that "I" did not help "you" (whoever "you" and "I" may be). The students need this knowledge in order to understand the conditional pattern. And every student in the class (except, of course, those who already know the target structure and can draw the right inferences) must get this information *from the teacher*. The students' knowledge of the world will not help them, because the sentences are fiction.

If instead of (66a) I use (66b) as my example, I can hope that at least some of my students already know the necessary background information--that Reagan did not lose in 1984 and that he did not go back to California. Those students who know these facts and look at (66b) in light of them already know what they need to know to understand the idea of unreal conditionals; they do not need to hear it from the teacher. (And those who do not know the historical information are no worse off with (66b) than with (66a).)

Let's compare (66a) and (66b) in another way. Let's imagine that (66a) has been written on the blackboard. There is discussion:

Student: Can I say "If you told me"?

Teacher: Yes, but then you have to say "would help."

Student: If you told me, I would help you. That's okay?

Teacher: Yes, but the meaning is different.

Student: Different meaning?

Teacher: Yes. Now it means....

Now let's imagine that (66b) is our example. The exchange between teacher and student might run like this:

Student: Can I say "If Reagan lost the 1984 election"?

Teacher: No. We're talking about the past, the election of 1984. Reagan didn't lose that election. So we say, "If he had lost..."

The use of the nonfiction example allows the teacher to focus on the structure at hand without being led into a discussion of related structures.

Question 7: Is there anything in the example that might keep the student from focusing on what is important?

Text M1, in presenting "causative *have*," uses these examples:

(68) John had his hair trimmed.

(69) We have just had a new house built.

(Text M1, page 71)

Both examples illustrate the rule, but the second example includes something which could lead the student off the track--that is, cause the student to focus on the wrong thing. The rule mentions *have* with a past participle, but in (69) there are two uses of *have* and two past participles. By exemplifying causative *have* in the present perfect form, the author has introduced another *have* and another past participle. Students must eventually be able to deal with sentences like (69), of course, but if they are just beginning to work with the structure, they may well find (69) confusing.

In (70), something quite different may lead the student off the

track

(70) Although the weather was warm, I wore a light jacket.

The potentially misleading element is *light*. A student who understands (70) properly will understand that the speaker means "I wore a light jacket instead of no jacket at all." A student who focuses on *light* may be confused by the apparent meaning "I wore a light jacket instead of a heavy one"--which, of course, is inconsistent with the *although* clause. An improved example would simply omit *light*.

Question 8: Does the example exemplify what it is intended to exemplify?

It may seem that this question is too obvious to mention, and in fact cases of examples which don't show what they are intended to show are rare in published texts. They are not so rare in manuscript versions of texts, however, and on blackboards in classrooms. Many structures in English are misleadingly similar to other structures, and it is inevitable that teachers will at times make the mistake of choosing an example which is not an example of the intended structure. Consider this set which, in a careless moment, might be used to exemplify embedded questions.

- (71) Tell me what you want.
- (72) Tell me who they hired.
- (73) Tell me where he is.
- (74) Tell me when she calls.
- (75) Tell me why you want the job.
- (76) Tell me how old you are.

A close examination will reveal that the subordinate clause in (74) is probably not an embedded question at all. The most likely interpretation of (74) is one in which it is synonymous with *When she calls, tell me*. If we change *calls* to *called*, (74) is a clearer example of a sentence with an embedded question.

Question 9: How much does the example alone tell the student?

Text A exemplifies *should*, *ought to*, and *had better* for expressing advisability in this way:

- (77) I should lose some weight.
 - (78) I ought to lose some weight.
 - (79) You should study harder.
 - (80) You ought to study harder.
 - (81) You shouldn't leave your keys in your car.
 - (82) The gas tank is almost empty. We had better stop at the next service station.
- (Text A, pages 150 and 151)

The sentences in (77) and (78) exemplify the syntax of *should* and *ought to* well enough, but they fail to reinforce the notion of advisability. The context of the target structure in the examples is in fact consistent with other modal meanings: I might lose some weight, I must lose some weight, I could lose some weight. The students don't know who "I" is. Unless they already know the target structure and can therefore draw the right inference, they do not know that "I" is overweight. The example does not reinforce the meaning of *should* and *ought to*, because the context *I _____ lose some weight* does not give any sure clues.

The contexts of the target structures are a little richer in (79) - (81). The students don't know who "you" is, but if they believe (as they well may) that it is advisable for *everyone* to study harder and that is inadvisable for *anyone* to leave keys in a car, then they receive some reinforcement of the notion of advisability.

Finally, in (82), the context of *had better* is rich enough to provide good reinforcement of the meaning of the target structure. The sentence in (82) clearly tells more about *had better* than (77) tells about *should*, and it does this at a cost of only a few more words.

Another set of examples, also involving *should*, comes from Text P. Under the heading *Expressing past time with should* +

have + *past participle*, the student reads:

- (83) Obligation: You should have voted in the election.
- (84) Expectation: We should have arrived at the airport twenty minutes ago.
- (85) Advice: You should have studied harder last semester.
(Text P, page 189)

Here the second and third examples, with their time adverbials, are more informative than the first. With no time clues, *the election* in the first example could be--for all the student knows--a coming election, not a past one.

Little needs to be said about the exemplification of *little* - *a little* and *few* - *a few* in Text F:

- (86) [rule] There is a difference in emphasis between *little* and *a little*, *few*, and *a few*. *A little*, *a few* have positive force--they stress the *presence* of something, although in a small quantity.
- (87) [example] I have a little money; I have a few friends.
- (88) [rule] *Little* and *few*, on the other hand, have negative force--they stress the *absence* of almost all quantity.
- (89) [example] I have little money; I have few friends.
(Text F, page 123)

Again, at a cost of only a few words, we can build enough information into the context of the target structure to make the example more telling:

- (90) Jill is bad at math. She works slowly and she always makes a few mistakes.
- (91) Sheelah is good at math. She works fast and she makes few mistakes.
- (92) Jim enjoys babysitting. He likes children and he makes a little money at the same time.
- (93) The patient is in bad condition. There is little hope that she will recover.

NINE PRINCIPLES OF EXEMPLIFICATION

1. Choose examples that exemplify an appropriate use of language.

2. Choose examples that demonstrate the need for the target structure. If the target structure could be omitted from the example with no loss of information, or if another structure would be likely to replace the target structure, then the example needs work.

3. Insofar as possible, choose examples that are not consistent with obvious false hypotheses that the student may have in mind.

4. Choose examples that do not assume knowledge of the world that the student may not have.

5. If similar examples are paraphrases, label them as paraphrases. If they are not, explain them, or (better) replace them with examples that are not misleadingly similar. Beware of the principle of minimal difference. Bend it enough so that students do not need to juggle contradictory contexts as they interpret a set of examples.

6. Favor nonfiction examples.

7. Insofar as possible, choose examples that do not include anything that may keep the student from focusing on what is important.

8. Take care that examples exemplify what they are intended to exemplify. English is full of misleadingly similar structures. Study examples to make sure that you (or your text writer) have not been careless.

9. Choose examples that tell the student as much as possible. It is often not difficult to improve an example in such a way that it helps the student understand the meaning and use of the target structure as well as the syntax. In this way, the example itself repeats the things that we tell the student in our explanations.

And one more

An example that is good according to one principle may be bad according to another. (Principles 4 and 7, especially, will often be in conflict.) Some of the examples I have offered as good

examples by one criterion may be bad by another criterion. For this reason, it is wise to exemplify a target structure with a variety of examples, keeping in mind the strengths and weaknesses of each one. So the final principle is:

10. An example shouldn't be lonely.

□

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